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Talking Points for the DCI

17 November 1988

The Libyan Chemical Weapons Program: Options for US Influence

In our judgment, Libya will resist strongly US political initiatives to undermine its chemical warfare (CW) program and would react violently to a military strike aimed at neutralizing it. Libyan leader Qadhafi has denied publicly that the Rabta Technology Center produces chemical warfare agents--claiming it is a pharmaceutical plant--but has asserted Libya's right to possess any type of weapon it chooses.

--Tripoli views a CW capability as essential to keep pace with regional powers also possessing chemical weapons including Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and especially Israel.

--As in the past, Qadhafi almost certainly will reject US accusations regarding Libya's CW capability by pointing to US and Israeli chemical and nuclear programs.

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We believe a US effort to prevent Libyan use of chemical weapons--as opposed to their possession--has a greater likelihood of success:

--Washington could quietly but strongly warn Tripoli--perhaps through a senior emissary--that it will not tolerate Libyan use of chemical weapons or their transfer to third parties and that such Libyan actions would have grave consequences. A similar warning from one or more NATO allies would reinforce the message.

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Libya is dependent on foreign firms to sustain production at Rabta and Washington could urge foreign governments, especially West Germany, France, Italy, and Japan, to prevent their companies from continuing to support the Libyan program.

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[REDACTED]

Reaction to US Attack

Qadhafi almost certainly would retaliate for a US military strike on Rabta. The most likely form of retaliation would be terrorist attacks against US personnel and facilities, but attacks by elite Libyan military units also are possible.

- Tripoli could call on several radical groups, such as the Abu Nidal Organization or Japanese Red Army activists, to mount terrorist operations and hide the Libyan hand. [REDACTED]
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- Qadhafi has a small cadre of well-trained elite military units that could mount covert attacks against US targets along the Mediterranean littoral. Navy commandos, for example, could attack US ships in port with limpet mines, or mine sea lanes.

- Either Libyan response would be accompanied by a vigorous diplomatic effort to obtain condemnation of the United States in international fora. [REDACTED]

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